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UNCLAS HANOI 002398

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SUBJECT: PRISONER AMNESTY DISAPPOINTING

Reftels (A) 8/14/04 Sim-Boardman E-mail (B) Hanoi 2208

1. (U) This is a retransmission and update of Hanoi 2397. First transmission duplicated and reinserted deleted text due to track-changes function of Microsoft Word.

2. (U) No U.S. citizens and no high-profile political prisoners were among the 8623 individuals receiving amnesties to mark Vietnam's National Day on September 2. In an August 30 press conference to announce the amnesty, Vice Foreign Minister Le Van Bang stated that "considerable consideration" had been given to those cases highlighted by foreign governments during bilateral discussions and human rights dialogues, and that ten individuals raised on these occasions would be included in the amnesty. That said, all ten of these had, in fact, already been released, one as long as four years ago.

3. (U) Subsequent to the press conference, the GVN provided to diplomats and the press the names of these ten individuals (list follows in Para 6). The USG had in the past raised these cases on various occasions, and we were already aware that nine of them were no longer incarcerated.

4. (U) Six of the ten are ethnic minorities from Phu Yen province identified as having been released between March and June 2004. During discussions with Ambassador Hanford in Washington in December 2003, however, VFM Bang had identified four of these six as having already been released.

5. (SBU) Comment: Considering that Vietnam's Ambassador to the U.S. had brought this amnesty to the attention of former EAP DAS Daley (Ref A), we are disappointed that the GVN delivered such an underwhelming result. Furthermore, as all ten of the individuals raised by the international community had already been released, it is hard to find much to be positive about. End Comment.

6. (U) List of ten amnesty recipients whose cases were raised by foreign governments:

-- Ho Van Trong. Trong's release in June had been highlighted in Australia's Human Rights Dialogue (Ref B).

-- Nguyen Ha Hai. Hai is the only individual receiving an amnesty about which the USG was not previously aware. He is reportedly the third ranking officer in the unrecognized Hoa Hao Central Buddhist Church, Nguyen Ha Hai. He was released from prison on May 31, but died on June 14.

-- Nguyen Ngoc Tan. Released April 4, 2000. Deceased.

-- Ho Vu Khang. Released January 19, 2002.

-- L Mo Y Bhit. Ethnic Minority from Phu Yen province. Released March 19, 2004.

-- Ksor Y Hoi. Ethnic Minority from Phu Yen province. Released June 2, 2004.

-- Ksor Y Lac. Ethnic Minority from Phu Yen province. Released March 19, 2004.

-- Y Blong Mlo. Ethnic Minority from Phu Yen province. Released June 2, 2004.

-- Y Du Ksor (Ama Hblit). Ethnic Minority from Phu Yen province. Released June 2, 2004.

-- Nay Y Bluk (Ama Hlit). Ethnic Minority from Phu Yen province. Released May 15, 2004.

BURGHARDT